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Editor :  
**G. G. Parikh**

Managing Editor : Guddi

D-15, Ganesh Prasad,  
Naushir Bharucha Marg,  
Mumbai - 400 007.

Email : [janataweekly@gmail.com](mailto:janataweekly@gmail.com)

## Celebrating Champaran 1917

**Irfan Habib**

At a moment when the ideals and events of our National Movement seem to be fading from public memory, it is gratifying, indeed, that there should be a celebration of the centenary of one of the most remarkable episodes of modern Indian history, the Champaran Satyagraha of 1917 - that opened a new phase in the National Movement by joining it to the great struggle of the Indian peasantry for bread and land.

Even since the Battle of Plessey (1757) British rule had meant a constant exploitation of India, the main burden of which had fallen on the peasants, artisans and the labouring poor of India. It has been the great intellectual achievement of the early nationalists that they were able to show how the twin processes of drain of wealth and de-industrialisation had ruined India. One sees the exposure and analysis in its classic form, in Dadabhoy Naoroji's *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901) and, in the form of a historical narrative, in R C Dutt's two-volume *Economic History of India under British rule* (1901, 1903). Gandhiji himself summarised

these findings in his *Hind Swaraj* (1909), originally written in Gujarati.

### **Indigo Oppression**

The impoverishment of India which the early nationalists so ably exposed was largely accomplished through means in which Englishmen themselves hardly ever appeared as the exploiters: the land revenue was exacted through zamindars or native officials; English goods were sold by Indian shopkeepers and hawkers. It was mainly in plantations and mines that the Englishman appeared directly as the oppressor. And among plantations, it was the indigo plantations where such oppression had the longest history. Indigo was a celebrated product of India, down the centuries, raised and processed locally by peasants. But in the seventeenth century, European-owned slave-plantations in West Indies began to produce it, the extraction process they used being improved immensely by use of boilers. When the English conquered Bengal, European indigo planters appeared soon enough. Obtaining zamindaris they coerced peasants into raising indigo, for the dye to be processed

out of the plants in their 'factories'. The coercion exercised by European planters on peasants to raise indigo and sell it cheaply to them - under methods portrayed in Bandhu Mitra's famous *Nil Darpan* (1860) - led to peasant 'disturbances' in Naddia in Bengal in 1859 and 1860. But these were suppressed by the administration.

Indigo plantations extended into Bihar, where too European planters used the zamindari system to force their peasant tenants to bow to their will. Where they could not buy zamindaris they obtained leases from local zamindars, and in the form of 'thekadars' exercised the same rights over peasants as they would have had as zamindars. In Champaran district of Bihar, most European planters obtained *thekas* for whole villages from the large Bettiah zamindari. Here, as the demand for indigo grew with expanding textile imports, the planters imposed what came to be known as the *tin-kathia* system, the peasants being forced to raise indigo on the best parts of their rented lands.

### European Exploitation

A crisis occurred when a synthetic dye was developed in Germany in the late 1880s. Since natural indigo dye could not compete with it, indigo exports from India declined in value from Rs 4.75 crore in 1894-95 to Rs. 2.96 crore five years later. As indigo prices and the planters' profits from indigo manufacture fell, the planters began correspondingly to increase the rent-burden on the peasants, invoking their rights as zamindars. The impositions took two major forms: As zamindars or thekadars the planters simply increased the rents paid by peasants, the increase in rent being called *sharahbeshi*, usually amounting to

50 to 60 per cent of the previous rent. The second form was a curious one. Since indigo prices fell, the peasants did not now wish to produce indigo, as they had to under the *tinkattia* system. The planters, who did not wish to buy it either, allowed the peasant to shift to other crops only if he agreed to pay them a large amount, known as *tawân*, 'compensation'. The amounts imposed were so large that the peasants had to undergo much hardship only to pay interest on it at the rate of 12 per cent per annum, let alone pay the principal. Another imposition on the peasants took the form of transferring to them plots out of the indigo factories' own cultivated lands (*zira'at*) charging high rents, under threat of throwing them out of their tenancies, if they declined to agree to take these on rent. The planters also collected illegal dues (*abwab*) and imposed fines. Alongside these exactions the planters made full use of the traditional zamindari practice of *begar*, forced unpaid or ill-paid labour, requisitioning at will the peasant's cattle, plough and carts or compelling them to provide labour for their plantations. In other words, the planters tried to throw the entire burden of the crisis caused by competition from synthetic indigo on to the shoulders of the peasants, while safe-guarding or even increasing their own profits.

That crisis for the planters eased in 1914 owing to the outbreak of World War I. Germany, the main producer of synthetic indigo, being one of the belligerent powers, the planters' profits from indigo revived, and many of them began to compel peasants to grow indigo again under the *tinkathia* system, while underpaying them for the crop by taking into account not the actual

produce, but the area sown with the crop. The earlier burdens on the peasants under both *sharahbeshi* and *tawan* continued as before, along with forms of *begar*. Peasants were thus faced with a situation where while prices increased owing to the War they were themselves subjected to rack-renting and forced to grow indigo despite a manipulated low rate of return on it, though raised in their best lands. They faced other kinds of ill-treatment as well at the hands of the planters and their staff, including beatings and pretty bribery. The planters' *raj* was complete and there was no relief for peasants forthcoming from the Bittiah Estate (now under Court of Wards at the time), which, having given leases (*thekas*) to the planters, shared in the gains made out of the oppression of the peasants.

### Champaran and Gandhiji

How a delegation from Champaran, attracted by news of the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress in December 1916 went to the session to draw attention to the Champaran peasants' plight and how later Raj Kumar Shukla brought Gandhiji from Calcutta to Patna and inexplicably left him there in April 1917 are matters now of traditional lore. It is what followed that is of the utmost importance.

Gandhi's handling of the Champaran struggle proved to be a model of serious leadership. He was stepping into an area where the peasants had been kept suppressed for so long that no 'stayagraha' of the form he had led in South Africa could here be organised. He, therefore, announced that he had come only to study the conditions and collect information, for which he was able to gather a group of intrepid

men, including his principal assistant Brajkishore Prasad and the future principal Congress leader of Bihar, Rajendra Prasad. What he and his group began to do was to move among peasants and just record their grievances. To the end, this was the form and substance of the Champaran Satyagraha.

### Grievance Collection

The British authorities knew that this was not as harmless an enterprise as it seemed. The very fact that once an individual peasant could go and record his complaints, others would follow from the ranks of what uptill now had been a subdued demoralised *raiyyat*. On 16 April the English District Magistrate ordered Gandhiji to leave the district, the order being issued under Sec. 144 Cr.P.C. Defying the ban, Gandhiji pleaded “guilty” before the District Magistrate at Motihari on 18 April, ready to face imprisonment for following “the voice of conscience”. It was this combination of moderation with determination that won the day. The administration trying to tie down Gandhiji with a long drawn-out case was flabbergasted at his cutting it short by the “guilty” plea. On the other hand, now not only the volunteers, including the famous Bihar Congress leader Mazharul Haq, but also a crowd of peasants gathered at the court, this being perhaps, the first real peasant demonstration in Champaran. The English Magistrate did not know what to do and adjourned the court, releasing Gandhiji on his own assurance of presence! Finally, the Government climbed down: On April 21, Gandhiji received intimation from the Lt Governor of Bihar and Orissa (no less!) of the withdrawal of the proceedings against him with even instructions issued to local officials to assist his “enquiry”.

This success opened the gates to the voicing and recording of complaints from peasants. Local vakils in large numbers joined his band of volunteers. The recording project turned into a real mass movement. As many as 8,000 peasants came and recorded their complaints, defying the planters and their men whose authority visibly crumbled. Peasants also began defiantly to return the high-rent carrying *zira ‘at* lands that planters had imposed on them.

The work of collection of peasants’ complaints took Gandhiji and his volunteers to poverty-stricken villages, where peasants could at last obtain a ray of hope that things could change. Not long afterwards, he received an invitation from another quarter: he was graciously invited to meet a high official of Government, ‘Hon. W. Maude’ at Ranchi on May 10. Gandhiji, as usual, never rejected negotiations and duly met Maude whom he promised to send a preliminary report on his findings, which he did on May 13. But he politely rejected Maude’s suggestion that he dissolve his team and abandon further pursuit of the enquiry into peasant grievances.

### Moral Battle

By now the planters and their association had exhausted all their arsenal: threats and inducements to individual peasants, manufactured incidents of violence or arson, canvassing, of English officials as men of their own race, and overtures to the great zamindars of Bihar. Gandhiji, on his part, won the moral battle by being ever ready to meet the planters and being unfailingly polite and courteous with them at the personal level. But he never left the side of the peasants.

Finally, the government capitulated. No less a person than E A Gait, the Lt Governor of Bihar and Orissa, along with the Chief Secretary, H McPherson, held a long meeting with Gandhiji on June 5, at Ranchi, and here a settlement was worked out. A committee of enquiry, with such broad terms of reference as to cover all the matters that were relevant to peasants’ grievances was to be instituted, the committee to include Gandhiji, as member along with a representative of planters and another of zamindars and three British officials, including the President of the Committee. All the evidence that Gandhiji had collected could be placed before it. It was assumed that its recommendations would be honoured by Government. In return, Gandhiji at last agreed to terminate his campaign of collecting peasant grievances.

The mass movement at Champaran, revolving around the recording of grievances was over. But the actual work of alleviating the grievances had now to be taken up. Again, it is a sign of Gandhiji’s mature leadership that he took up work on this committee with the greatest care and earnestness. He attended all its meetings, presented full evidence before it and was alert in assessing promptly all the proposals that were put before it.

Gandhiji kept the European planters’ transgressions alone as the target of attack. The planters expressed their readiness to reduce the *sharahbeshi* rent by only 25 per cent, while Gandhiji demanded a reduction, at least, of 40 per cent. When the official members proposed that the balance of 15 per cent. might be met from the revenues of the Bettiah Estate, Gandhiji at once demurred. Clearly, he did not wish

to annoy the zamindars of Bihar, who had remarkably remained neutral in the matter. Ultimately, he accepted a 26 per cent reduction in *sharahbeshi* to be borne entirely by the planters.

It is remarkable that the Committee was able to present a unanimous well-written factually rich report by October 3, 1917. It practically conceded the truth of all the grievances that Gandhiji's own "enquiries" had brought out. It recommended the abolition of the *tinkathia* system and gave freedom to the peasants to grow whatever crop they chose. It denounced the payment by planters for indigo by the area sown and not actual outturn. The reduction of *sharahbeshi* rent by 26 per cent (as settled by Gandhiji with planters) was approved; and it was recommended that the *tawan* be abolished, no further payment of principal or interest on this account to be levied on the peasants. All *abwabs* or additional levies and perquisites as well as fines were held illegal. It recommended that a proclamation to this effect, with penalties to be prescribed, be issued. Above all, the *thekadari* or village-contracting system by which the planters gained zamindari rights over peasants in villages outside their plantations was to be phased out. Rights in hides were to belong to the peasant owners of the animals, not the planters. The minutes of the Committee meetings show how Gandhiji took up every issue of interest to the peasants and argued their case mostly successfully.

#### **Agrarian Act**

The major recommendations of the Committee required certain changes to be embodied in law and

so Government ordered a law to be prepared in the very month of October 1917, this taking the form of the Champaran Agrarian Act, 1918. It is characteristic of Gandhiji that he also scrutinised the draft bill and suggested changes in its text to protect the tenants' interests. Characteristically too, he spent little time in celebrating the huge success he had achieved for the peasants and the poor of Champaran.

The Champaran Satyagraha was the first struggle that Gandhiji undertook on Indian soil after his great 20-year long movement for the defence of Indians' rights in South Africa. It was to be followed quickly by the Ahmedabad workers' strike against indigenously millowners and

by the Kheda satyagraha against revenue enhancements, both in 1918; and then the all-India April satyagraha of 1919 against the Rowlatt Acts and, finally, the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement of 1920-22. But the Champaran *satyagraha* will always remain as the crucial starting point, the yoking, for the first time, of peasant unrest to the national movement, an assured guarantee for the ultimate success of the latter. As we observe the centenary of the event today, one wonders how any tribute could be adequate for the firmness and determination shown by Mahatma Gandhi and the unflinching resistance offered by the long-oppressed Champaran peasants at his call.

## **Footprints of A Crusader (The Life Story of Mrunal Gore)**

by

**Rohini Gawankar**

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## Where Are India's Dissenting Hindus ?\*

**Harsh Mander**

In these troubled times, the world's two largest democracies – India and the US – are increasingly becoming hostile, threatening places for people with Muslim names. US President Donald Trump's ban on the entry of citizens from Muslim majority countries signals an official ideology legitimised from the top that people of Muslim faith are potentially dangerous. In India, the appointment of a man who revelled in hate speech and communal incitement against Muslims as chief minister of UP, the country's most populous state – which, if independent, would be the fifth largest country in the world – similarly signals, in the words of *The Guardian*, that "...in India minorities exist mainly on the goodwill of the majority. Step out of line and there will be blood." And blood has already begun to flow.

By all estimates, India is heading for a scorching summer. Signs are evident everywhere that the soaring mercury will be matched by the sweltering heat of hate speech and violence stirred against the country's minorities. In his early years in the country's highest office, Prime Minister Narendra Modi somewhat distanced himself from his own hard-edged communally surcharged oratory during his tenure as Gujarat chief minister by resorting to a rhetoric of relative moderation, especially when speaking on foreign soil.

His party president, ministers and legislators, however, felt no need to don a mask of restraint in their continued communal, and

often openly hateful, public provocations. This division of labour was useful for those who wished to explain away their support for Modi as being for his business-friendly economic policies and not his communal agenda, which they claimed was being pursued by his aides against his will. This apology never really carried real credibility, because a leader as powerful as Modi could easily have brought all his colleagues into line with a single rebuke if that was what he really wanted. However, with rabble-rousing Adityanath's selection, it is clear that he no longer feels a need for masks. With Trump's openly bigoted anti-minority stances, there is today a much more permissive environment for countries like India to also follow Muslim-baiting strategies more openly.

We have often heard of the frog who when thrown into a pot of boiling water, reacts immediately by jumping out. If the frog is placed into lukewarm water, which is slowly heated, it does not react or resist even as the water gradually boils, and the frog ultimately dies. Zoologists today contest the science of this experiment, but as a metaphor, it vividly illustrates the difference between what is unfolding against Muslim minorities in the US and India.

Trump, with his brash inexperience, threw the frog into boiling water. The cruelty and injustice were clearly visible to the world, and the frog also reacted. In India, the process is much more akin

to a slow but lethal raising of temperatures, through countrywide cow vigilante attacks, campaigns against religious conversion, communal election rhetoric, and the demonising of Muslims as terrorists, sexual predators, serial divorcees and irresponsible breeders. Observers are unable to comprehend the enormity of the assault. The frog – for us, the democratic rights to equality and freedom of Muslim minorities in both countries – is gradually being boiled alive.

In India and the US, the rhetoric led from the top convinces the dominant groups that it is they who are persecuted, rather than being the oppressors or even the privileged. Thus, in the US, white Americans are persuaded that the country belongs to them, but is being taken away by coloured people, alien immigrants and untrustworthy Muslims. In India, the message is that the country belongs to the Hindu majority, but it is being stolen – aided by corrupt 'secular' parties – by Muslims whose loyalty lies outside this land. This moral inversion resonated in both democracies, spurring the rise of a minority persecution complex in the majority.

This systematic hate propaganda met with some resistance from white Americans, mostly college educated. In India, however, the greatest support to divisive ideologies comes from people with the highest levels of education and privilege. I find much greater instinctive willingness for peaceful and respectful co-living

between people of differences in India among those who have been denied education and benefits of economic growth. This worryingly illuminates what higher education does to those who benefit from it in India – far from building liberal values or scientific temper, it seems only to nurture a sense of selfish entitlement and prejudice against minorities of various kinds and the poor.

These differences endure even when the privileged and educated Indians migrate to the US. Recent immigrant Sukhada Tatke observes in an article in the *Firstpost* the glaring absence of voices of fellow Indians in street demonstrations and protest marches as well as on social media feeds after Trump's election. She speaks of her California-based cousin who wondered why she was so distraught:

*\*This article first appeared in The Wire (www.thewire.in)*

“Nothing he does is going to affect you, he had said. Is that any consolation? I snapped back. Today, only after new moves in the president's immigration policy has he slowly begun to speak out against the dangers of a Trump presidency because he himself feels threatened by it.”

The most striking differences between India and the US has been the response of ordinary people to the anti-Muslim policies of their governments. Protestors gathered with welcoming signs at American airports within hours of the first travel ban being announced, people visited their Muslim neighbours to reassure them of their safety, judges at all levels struck down the presidential order, lawyers gathered at airports to offer legal aid and film actors spoke eloquently for the rights

of people of colour and minority faiths in film award functions.

In India, I wait for the day when in UP villages where posters have come up giving notice to Muslim residents to leave, Hindu residents reassure their Muslim neighbours that they are both welcome and safe; where they fight to defend the security and livelihoods of tens of thousands of people threatened by cow politics and contested abattoirs; where students, teachers, lawyers, doctors, workers, farmers, actors and journalists all join the battle against the toxic politics of baiting and scapegoating minorities.

Our silences can only signal our complicity with the brazen changing of India into a Hindu country. A land where minorities must submit, else blood will flow.

## Beef Eating And Gorakshaks

**Chandra Bhal Tripathi**

Once again the talk of total ban on cow slaughter and slaughter of cow progeny has gained currency with the call of the RSS chief Mohan Bhagawat for the same. Some friends have suggested that the Central Government should pass a Central legislation forthwith as no party in the Rajya Sabha, where the ruling party is in a minority at present, will dare oppose it. Let us consider some relevant facts and the historical background.

I don't recall in which tribal areas in the North-East cow slaughter and beef eating are common and wonder if the BJP Government at the Centre will be

willing to enforce a law banning these practices since they are trying hard to make inroads into these areas. But I remember that in Nagaland the most common meat is pork. However, I wish to raise some fundamental questions.

(1) Food habit has nothing to do with religion. I am a strict vegetarian and a teetotaler, have not taken even egg or tasted beer, but hate to interfere with the food habits of any individual. No value judgment should be attached to this issue.

(2) Meat eating of all kinds was common in ancient India even in the Epic ages. It is only Bhagawan

Krishna who realised the importance of preservation and promotion of cow and was, therefore, called Gopal. This was the theory forwarded by my esteemed mother, late Smt Durgawati Tripathi. I shall be thankful if some friend could enlighten me by citing the propounding of this theory by any scholar or social worker before her.

(3) The People of India in 16 volumes published by the Anthropological Survey of India has concluded that 85 per cent of India's population is non-vegetarian and beef eaters include Muslims, Christians, many tribal and even SC

communities. I can also say with confidence that many Hindus in foreign countries eat beef. I have observed this personally in many countries in Asia, Europe and North America.

(4) Meat is meat whether it is of cow or pig, buffalo or horse, dog (eaten by a revered Indian sage when hungry) or any other animal. It is irrational to discriminate various species of animals for this purpose. If a Hindu friend asks me to partake of meat, I tell him that I shall do so if he agrees to eat beef with me. Similarly if a Muslim friend asks me likewise, I tell him that I shall do so if he agrees to eat pork with me.

(5) I have seen reports that in UP 80 per cent of holders of licences for export of beef are HINDUS and JAINS. One of them was a notorious BJP MLA of western UP who instigated communal riots over the issue of cow slaughter and beef eating. I remember that the contractor in my home town in eastern UP for supply of cows for consumption of American soldiers during World War II belonged to a family of Hindu Mahasabha and RSS leaders.

(6) The RSS is vainly trying to project a great revolutionary anti-caste spiritual leader and Karmayogi Swami Vivekananda as one believing in Hindutva. It named its training centre as Vivekananda Kendra at Kanyakumari and has a big Vivekananda Centre in Chanakyapuri, New Delhi, that was headed by Ajit Doval (actual pronunciation Dobhal), the present NSA of the Government of India,

who retired as the Director of the Intelligence Bureau.

These friends should read about the famous episode in which Swamiji was furious with a Gerua-clad preacher probably from the undivided Punjab who came to Swamiji seeking funds for protection of cows. Swamiji asked him: "A terrible famine has now broken out in Central India. The India Government has published a death-roll of nine lakhs of starving people. Has your society done anything to render help in this time of famine?" The preacher foolishly said that this famine broke out as a result of men's Karma, their sin. It is recorded: "Hearing the words of the preacher, sparks of fire, as it were, scintillated out of Swamiji's large eyes; his face became flushed." The preacher slipped away. That was Swami Vivekananda for whom human life was much more important than that of an animal, be it a cow. Let these lathi-wielding protectors of cow, who normally have nothing to do with intellectual pursuits, read pages 8-11 of the book 'Talks with Swami Vivekananda' (18th Reprint, August 2013) published by the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Champawat, Uttarakhand.

(7) We need not do any investigation into the background of these so-called 'gorakshaks' when Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself said that the Ministry of Home Affairs had been asked to keep a tab on these elements 70 per cent of whom were criminals, parading themselves as protectors of cow, wearing saffron scarves and creating terror during the day and changing into jeans, drinking and indulging in criminal activities

at night. With the recent victory of Hindutva forces in the State Assembly elections in some States and a so-called Yogi as the Chief Minister of the largest State it has become a harder problem to tackle the menace of these so-called 'gorakshaks' unless the political authorities at the Centre adopt a more accommodating approach.

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# Family System And The Question Of Womens's Freedom

Alka Joshi and Neeraj Jain

*"Don't cross the boundaries while asking questions, Gargi, else your head will be severed from your body."*

- Rishi Yadnyavalka threatening the renowned scholar Gargi during a debate in King Janak's court

When one starts talking about women's liberation in society, the reactions are usually: "You are out to break the family system"; "If a woman is liberated, what will happen to her children?"; "Then who will do the household work?"; "This will spread utter chaos in society"; etc. etc.

Yes, this is indeed how most people react when the question of women's freedom, independence and self-reliance is raised. A society which has believed since times immemorial that women are unworthy of freedom, where a woman who ventures alone out of her house is considered to be of "easy virtue" or "characterless", how can such a society even tolerate "freedom" and "liberation" for its women? Women, who as Manu declared, deserve to be abused ... their liberation? O God! What has the world come to! The question of women's freedom is not a subject of debate—it crosses the boundaries of debate.

On the one hand, it is true that times are changing. Our society is going through a period of painful transition. We no longer live in Gargi's and Yadnyavalkya's times. Today, a fiat like the one issued by Rishi Yadnyavalkya will not be accepted. Today, the debate on women's freedom and independence can today no longer

be concluded by issuing diktats based on *Manusmruti's* verses. Systems based on age-old inequalities and injustices are being questioned. Women are increasingly breaking traditional moulds and seeking their own identities. They are stepping out of their homes and doing all kinds of jobs.

However, on the other hand, there is still a lot of resistance in our society to these changes. Even if a woman attains eminence in society, her family does not recognise the respect and admiration she has won for herself in society. On the contrary, all kinds of questions are raised on her going out of her house and taking up a job and becoming economically independent, such as, who will look after the housework and children during her absence from the house, what impact her interacting with other men will have on her character, etc. The media too reinforces these backward views present in society through programs that reinforce the belief that a girl's destiny in life is to grow up and get married, show the 'liberated' woman to be reckless and irresponsible, depict the husband and children of a working woman as being helpless when she is not at home, etc.

It is high time we started questioning old social values and modes of thinking that consider

women's freedom and independence to be wrong and immoral. We need to set aside our prejudices and rationally analyse these societal beliefs and doubts. We need to recognise that a woman too is a human being. She has full rights to decide her role in society and how she should fulfill it. But our society has not given women this right, they have not been given independence and freedom to develop their inherent potential, and that in turn has affected society's development, because society has not been able to utilise their inherent brilliance and capabilities for its growth.

In our society, a woman's role has been restricted to within the family. When a girl is growing up, if she wants to go out and play, or learn dance or music, she is scolded—first help in the kitchen, you must first learn to cook. When she grows up and gets married, all the tasks outside the home are the responsibility of her husband, while all household tasks—such as cooking, sweeping-mopping, washing clothes, taking care of children, etc.—are considered to be her responsibility. While doing all her household chores, if she wants to go out to do a job and be independent, she has to struggle within her family: "What do we lack in our house that you feel the need to take up a job?" "You want to earn even though your husband is there!" By insinuating that her wanting to go out and work



would adversely affect the prestige issue of her family, all her enthusiasm is gradually killed.

A woman does not have her own independent identity. She is always identified as being someone's mother, wife and daughter. Her mother/father-in-law, sister/brother-in-law, husband and children — these constitute the limits of her existence. Her family is the be-all and end-all of her existence, she does not have the permission to cross this threshold. All her joys and sorrows are limited to within this boundary.

A woman's place in the home is evident from the names women use for their husbands, such as 'malak' (owner), 'swami' (lord), etc. These names describe reality. Within the house, a woman is nothing more than a man's slave, who wields unrestrained power over her. A man has the right to beat her, have sex with her even when she is ill, rape her, throw her out of the house for no reason, bring home a second wife at whim. All scriptures and religious books give sanction to this power wielded by men over women, and declare that it is a woman's duty to serve her God-incarnate husband. Female foeticide, harassment for dowry, domestic violence, abuse—a woman is forced to silently bear all this violence, all in the name of saving her family's reputation, honour, etc. Such injustice and violence on women has become so common in our society that people don't even notice it. Even if a man commits grave atrocities and injustices on his wife, no one reproaches him for it, his standing and reputation in society is not affected. This goes to the extent that when a young bride is killed for the sake of dowry, the entire society remains silent and attempts are made to hush up the case.

So many young girls' have seen their dreams trampled, have been deprived of education, have been married off to complete strangers at an age when they should have been singing-playing-studying. A girl tolerates all this, as she is brought up to believe that all the decisions regarding her life are to be taken by her parents, husband or even her brother; she does not have the right to take any important decisions regarding her life. And when a girl defies these rules and has a relationship with a man from another community, the village panchayat orders her to be raped; when she dares to defy her family to marry a 'man of her choice', the couple is brutally murdered by their family members. The silent acquiescence of society to such crimes/murders makes one feel that society can stoop to any level and break any law to protect this form of the family and the rights of men within it.

Should we give acceptance to such an oppressive form of the family? Can we call this an ideal family? Endorsing it means endorsing the inequality and autocracy inherent in it. History tells us that this form of the family has not always been so. In ancient human society, for many thousands of years till modern civilisation evolved, society was egalitarian, women were the head of the family and played an important role in the economic and social life of the community. With the evolution of private property, as wealth and power gradually started getting concentrated in the hands of men, women were gradually deprived of their social rights and imprisoned in the home. Thus arose patriarchy within the family system which relegated the woman to a slave's role. (Discussing how this transition

took place is beyond the scope of this essay.)

Old societal systems are obsolete today. We are no longer living in a feudal society where society was autocratically ruled by feudal lords and kings and there was no democracy for the people. Today, we are living in a democratic nation state where the rulers are elected on the basis of periodic elections and society is governed not by the whims of kings but on the basis of a written constitution that has been drafted by a democratically elected body. Our Constitution guarantees equality to men and women. However, the old feudal patriarchal family structure continues to exist. It is time that this structure is broken. Women must be freed from the confines of this form of the family, and in its place new family values based on mutual equality and mutual respect and genuine love need to be established. If marriage is the union of two lives and if love is a bond between two individuals based on mutual respect and trust, then where is the place for inequality and autocracy in such a relationship?

Only a family based on complete equality between man and woman, where there is mutual respect, love and trust between its members can give birth to a good citizen. A family is a girl or boy child's first school. It has an enormous influence on her/his value system and mental make-up. A child's home environment, her/his cultural upbringing, her/his parents' financial, social and cultural status, their method of raising their child, together determine what kind of human being a child will grow up to be. An ideal family is one which instills the values of equality, justice, honesty, hard-work, self-respect, rationality, generosity and fraternity

in a child, instills confidence in the child, provides the child the social-cultural atmosphere to develop his/her inherent potential, and motivates the child to become independent, form opinions take the initiative in every thing.

But can one expect this of an illiterate and slave-like mother, or an autocratic and arrogant father? Most definitely not. A home where inequality and patriarchal power are considered to be matters of prestige; a home where the mother is a slave, who blindly follows superstitions, customs and traditions, who is dependent on her husband for everything, who is daily abused by her husband, who is not even conscious of the fact that she has lost all her self-confidence and self-respect; a home where the father is arrogance personified; a home where there is no place for equality and logic, and orders are followed obediently—how can such a family nurture the values of equality, self-respect, justice and logical reasoning in a child? Only a mother who is well-educated, independent, confident, well-informed, cultured and has an independent personality can provide good upbringing to a child. A humane and just society can come into being only when the other half of its population, that is, the women, become free.

But in our society, unfortunately, a very large number of people continue to cling to old beliefs and value systems, and want to take advantage of inequality and male-dominated mindsets. They obviously do not want this old family system to be replaced by a new type of a family. These people, who are vociferous in their opposition to women's liberation, feel a loss in their prestige when women go out of the house to work. They

consider a woman to be family property / a decked-up object adorning the house / a machine for giving birth to the family heir / a body to be used for one's sexual satisfaction.

Such people do not realise that times are changing, and that in today's democratic society, relationships based on unbridled power and inequality cannot survive indefinitely. Sooner or later, women were going to rebel against these patriarchal bonds, and they have started fighting for their freedom. When women start asserting themselves, start fighting for their rights as equal human beings, these people vociferously condemn the women's liberation movement, claiming that it is breaking up the family and taking society to ruin. This is an outright lie. Let us examine their most important allegations.

Firstly, when women start affirming their rights, it is very rare that the family breaks up because of this. On the contrary, as the woman gradually asserts her identity, after initial strains within the family, it actually strengthens the family bond as now the relationship between the husband-wife or father-daughter becomes more democratic.

Secondly, if at all families are breaking up today, if we look closer, we will find that in the majority of cases, it is actually the men who are responsible for the break-up of the family. Men humiliate women and abandon them for not giving birth to a male child, and even bring home a second wife; or they run away from their responsibilities and take to drinking, leaving the wife to somehow take care of the children; or they keep a mistress. But all these

instances are not considered as breaking-up of the family, the wife is advised by society to stoically bear her suffering and somehow keep the family together and wait for the husband to mend his ways. But as soon as a woman decides to stand on her own feet and be economically independent, this is immediately dubbed as affecting the unity of the family system.

The words "mistress" or "concubine" do not have any masculine-gendered synonyms in our vocabulary, because in general it is only men who have been entering into such relationships, and continue to do so to this day. When women get equal rights in society and become financially independent, this will not lead to anarchy in society or cause the break-up of the family system; on the contrary, it will act as a check on men's promiscuity. A man will have to be faithful to his wife, because now she has the confidence and ability to leave him if he dares to be unfaithful. The relationship between husband and wife will now be based on mutual love, respect and trust. And words such as "mistress" and "concubine" will gradually become extinct in society.

The fear that a free and independent woman working outside the home will neglect housework and upbringing of children is also baseless. What do we see happening in practice? Today, whether it be a girl student or a working woman, she does all the household chores. She also capably discharges all responsibilities towards her children. But on the other hand, if there is an unemployed man in the house, he does not even help in housework; and the few men who do help out with household tasks are shamed as being tied to the apron strings of their wives.

Therefore, to conclude, all fears about women's freedom and independence are baseless and stem from a patriarchal mindset. These fears have no connection to reality.

Society needs to seriously ponder over this question of women's freedom. If we wish that today's children who will be the citizens of tomorrow imbibe the values of independence, self-respect and equality right from birth, if we wish that our country should break out of the shackles of centuries-old superstitions and antiquated value systems and progress and become strong, then we need to drastically reform our family system and create the social conditions that encourage women's freedom and independence. Women's participation in all walks of life needs to be increased, they need to be educated and need to be encouraged to become financially self-reliant. Arrangements will have to be put in place to ensure that women have abundant opportunities for education and employment. The household duties and child-rearing duties assigned to women should be shared, and men need to be encouraged to take equal responsibility for these tasks. Along with that, society must make provisions for crèches for babies in workplaces (so that women can take care of or nurse their babies as and when needed), day-care centres for small children, and community kitchens — so that women can be freed from their dual burden of work. In this manner, if the entire society becomes aware of the need for woman's freedom and independence, only then will women truly become free.

## ***Political Resolution***

### **Socialist Party (India) National Executive Meeting Delhi, April 9, 2017**

#### **On Right to Life and Dignity**

Every Indian citizen who believes in the propriety of the Constitution must give a serious thought to the dangerous developments taking place in the country. The Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh is openly advocating for 'Hindu Rashtra' on the lines formulated by the RSS, and there are talks in government circles of changing the very nature of the Constitution which ensures a socialist and secular India.

The opponents of the present BJP government and its fanatic ideology apart, innocent citizens, who are not involved in power politics or any other kind of opposition are repeatedly and openly being thrashed and killed mercilessly by goons. The victims are mostly poor dalits, adivasis, minorities - Muslims, Christians and women. The recent case of lynching of Pehlu Khan, a dairy farmer, in Alwar district of Rajasthan, is another such example. The police are at best silent spectators, but at times even give encouragement. This shows that the present government is not willing to protect the right to life and dignity of citizens, ensured in the Constitution.

The Socialist Party condemns this unconstitutional, inhuman and uncivilized attitude of the government in strongest terms. The party demands immediate action against the culprits who lynched Pehlu Khan.

#### **On Demonetisation**

The Modi Government claims to

be serious about fighting the scourge of black money gripping the Indian economy. On November 8, PM Modi announced the demonetisation of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 notes and declared that its principal aim was to crack down on black money in the country. However, it was a farcical measure. Demonetisation can, at the most, demobilise only the black cash, that is, the illegal money, stored with the people at this present moment, and that too, only a small part of it. It does nothing to curb black money generation, nor does it attack the black wealth that has accumulated in the economy over the past years. That the government is not really serious about curbing the black economy is obvious from the fact that it is wilfully not taking any action against those who have huge hoards of black wealth, such as the 500 Indians who are known to have hidden their wealth in tax havens abroad, whose names have been revealed in the Panama Papers Scandal of 2016. It has been reluctant to curb P-notes. The BJP is not willing to make public its own sources of funding, such as from where it got the Rs 30,000 crore it spent during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections; on the contrary, it has been seeking to dilute anti-corruption legislations.

That the demonetisation policy has proved to be a total failure and has demobilised only a very small amount of black money, is obvious from the fact that three months after the December 31 deadline for depositing the demonetised notes in banks ended, the government has not yet

declared how much money has come back into the system! On the other hand, demonetisation has had a devastating effect on the informal sector, including agriculture, small retail and small businesses, and has destroyed the livelihoods of lakhs of people. But the government is not willing to admit even this, and has gone to the extent of manufacturing statistics to show that demonetisation has not had any adverse effect on economic growth. The government kept changing the rules on demonetization almost every day causing confusion and hardships to the public. Over 100 people died due to this arbitrary and abrupt decision. But there was not a single word of sympathy from the PM/government.

### **On passing important bills as Money Bills**

The Modi Government has been using the stratagem of classifying important bills as Money Bills to get them enacted as Acts of Parliament only by the approval of the Lok Sabha, since such bills do not require to be passed in the Rajya Sabha.

This undemocratic strategy has already been employed in the case of the Aadhaar Bill, even though it does not meet the necessary criteria for being such a classification. In fact, it contains many provisions which will have far reaching implications for the fundamental and constitutional rights of Indian citizens. Now, the government is using the same tactics to get the Finance Bill passed, even though it has several important features that have no place in a Money Bill. Thus, it contains several provisions that will drastically increase black money and corruptions, such as the provision enabling political parties

to receive unlimited and anonymous funding from corporate entities and from abroad. It is important that such bills, which have serious implications for democratic functioning and financial security of all citizens, be publicly debated, and most importantly, must be subject to proper democratic scrutiny in both houses of Parliament.

The BJP government is tearing all established conventions of the people democracy. Thus Companies (Amendments) Act 2016 is most mischievous. As per the amendments political parties can officially get donations from foreign firms without attracting provisions of FCRA. At present under the Companies Act there is a ceiling for donation, the especially making it anonymous. Central Government's amendment will result in, as an American Commentator has said after Citizens Case in USA, that nation will have corporate democracy and not people democracy. This can be challenged in the court on the ground of violation of Article 14 of the Constitution and irrelevancy of these legislations behind the passing of Finance Bill.

This willful violation of Constitutional propriety by the Modi Government once again goes to prove that it has no respect for the Indian Constitution. Furthermore, the government, by promoting private sector at the cost of public sector and by diluting labour laws in favour of industrialists, is violating the very spirit of the Constitution. The BJP Government is determined to dismantle public Sector, the sheet anchor for a Socialist Society. The centralisation of power in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is another example of ignoring constitutional

spirit of decentralisation.

### **The Socialist Party demands:**

To disclose in public the names of big defaulters of Public Sector Banks, the total amount being **Rs 8 lakh crores**. Why should they be shielded, when they are endangering the public interest and economy?

To disclose the names of all Swiss Banks and other tax heavens account holders without delay and to bring back the black money, as promised by Narendra Modi in the 2014 election campaign.

To stop any election funding by the corporate sector even in the guise of separate electoral trusts formed by corporate houses.

To introduce minimum of 30 per cent Income Tax on higher incomes including that on Corporate Sector.

To introduce Inheritance Tax, to reduce gross inequality in the Society.

To revive the Women Reservation Bill in State Legislature and Parliament.

With these immediate demands, the Socialist Party appeals to the citizens of India, particularly the youth, and all the political parties to come together to protect the Constitution of India in order to build a self-reliant, prosperous and civilised nation.

**Thus Stands the Socialist Party Upholding Brotherhood and Equality**



# Democratisation of Higher Education in India: Ambedkar's Vision\*

**K. S. Chalam**

I am grateful to the Dr B R Ambedkar Open University Vice-chancellor, the Executive, and Prof Sudharani for the opportunity given to me to present some of my views relating to Babasaheb Ambedkar's role in democratising higher education in India.

Education as a process of learning and disseminating of knowledge is alien to India as learning was from the very beginning related to enlightenment and self-realization of the individual. A savant like Swamy Dayanand Saraswati whose clarion call 'Back to Vedas' has now found a resonance had emphasized on character formation as the chief function of education. He had also advocated compulsory education of the masses and believed the state needed to ensure it for every Indian including untouchables. His scheme of education was traditional but adopted by the British to a large extent if we look at the curriculum of some of the courses taught in Government colleges like Rajahmundry during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is different from the Western concept of education where it is defined as 'acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge' (Whitehead).

One of the most influential thinkers at the time, and a great educator who had a profound influence on Dr B R Ambedkar (as his student), John Dewey said that, 'education is the process of re-construction or re-constitution of experience giving it more detailed value through the medium of increased social

efficiency'. He further noted that, "What nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life". As author of 'Democracy and Education', he said that, "if education is equivalent to genuine living, then democracy is the moral foundation of education. The essence of education is the extension of shared areas of meaningful action and this is also the essence of democracy". These ideas are found repeatedly in the writings of Ambedkar where he invariably quotes his teacher from Columbia University.

## Higher Education

We are concerned here about higher education. It is just not an extension of school education, it has its own identity, content, process and objectives and functions. Though higher education in a country is related to the structure of educational system of the country, it need not necessarily follow it. Interestingly, a section of economists have made higher education a commodity rather a private good to be offered on sale in any part of the world at any time. Therefore discussing democratization of higher education in India today is a daunting task.

B R Ambedkar having experienced what freedom stands for in a western democracy, both in USA and England wished that it should happen in India too. Critiquing undemocratic social institutions like caste, he emphasized the democratic principles involved in Buddhist Sangha. He desired that democracy should prevail in all our

relations: economic, social and political. We could notice in his speeches and writings that democracy should remain the bedrock of all educational endeavours as it remains the mother that provides the cultural background to sustain an equitable socio-economic order.

## Democratising Learning

What do we mean by democratisation of education? Is it equality of opportunity to get a place in the system of education? Is it a system of providing additional inputs to those whose family background is different from others where traits of a particular group are taken as standards to get admission? Is it to normalize the inputs of education and the outcome? Is it JP Naik's Coefficient of Equality at different stages? Is it Jencks's measure of inequality in income related to education? Is it reduction in the intergenerational inequality in income? And so on. But in most of the studies of scholars the enrolment of SC or ST or OBC in different educational institutions in relation to their respective populations as a measure of equality or democratizing education or the so-called JP Naik measure is considered. Even Indian Judiciary, popular discourse of Dalit and Bahujan intellectuals look at these figures to find out how they are discriminated. This measure, no doubt gives broad view of democratization, but it doesn't take in to account the disadvantages and the deficiencies suffered by the students of weaker sections for generations while getting

admissions based on a particular score. It also doesn't carry the need for parity in the enrolment of students from different courses of study in higher education including the enrolment in private sector institutions. There are several other issues that need to be considered by scholars to find out solutions to the problem.

The demand for places in public educational institutions started with the social movement of Jyoti Rao Phule who submitted a memorandum to Hunter commission along with the Muslims of Ganjam district of Madras presidency in 1882. In the princely states of Mysore, Kolhapur, Baroda and several other places the local Zamindars have provided opportunities of admission for lower castes. In fact D D Gholap, C K Bole Members of Bombay Legislative Council demanded free and compulsory education for untouchables in 1921 before Babasaheb Ambedkar made a strong case for it in 1927-28. Ambedkar was not satisfied with free and compulsory primary education, he was interested in higher education. You will find in his speeches both in Legislative debates and in public platforms he had made strong appeal both to the government and dalits to get admissions in to higher education and in science and technology courses. This had a cascading effect on the enrolments in higher education in different parts of the country. But, unfortunately, it is not uniform and varies from state to state.

### **Education as a Universal Right**

The development of education in India as a universal right is considered to be of very recent origin. Though the British are given the credit of being the benefactors of Universal

Education in India, the historical evidence does not support this claim. The argument between Mahatma Gandhi and Sir Hartog is a known controversy in educational history as Gandhiji could not substantiate his claim that there was universal education in India before the British came to this country. It is equally true that the British has failed to provide educational opportunities to every citizen in this country. It was only after the Woods Dispatch of 1854, the British Government took some interest in the educational development of the natives. As mentioned above, Jyoti Rao Phule who in his memorandum to Hunter Commission in 1882 accused the British for their penchant in providing educational opportunities only to the upper castes, while collecting huge revenue from the illiterate Shudras and Atishudras. One can say that this is the beginning of a movement for mass education in the country. However, no systematic attempt was made by any known leader thereafter for the educational upliftment of everyone in the country. It is in this context, the role of B R Ambedkar as a pragmatist of universal compulsory education for all and higher education as compulsory qualification for scheduled castes to enter public service need to be noticed. Perhaps he is the only leader of the pre-independence period who had a vision for a people's education movement in India.

While contextualizing Ambedkar Movement as a protest movement, M S Gore, Gail Omvedt and several social scientists placed Dr Ambedkar as a leader of the untouchables. He was never projected by the mainstream scholarship as a positive contributor to the overall social and educational development of the country. He has been a victim of

reductionism and in this context some of his followers are also responsible in joining the bandwagon of reductionism. Therefore, one of the important contributions of Ambedkar's to Indian Society, the "educational development" has remained obscured. It is brought out by scholars now that there were great leaders in South-India such as Ayothidas (1845-1914), Ayyankali (1863-1914) and others who have preceded Dr Ambedkar in their mission of amelioration of the social and educational conditions of the Dalits. But, the contributions of these savants are limited to the South while Ambedkar's contribution had an all India character due to several reasons. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the contribution of Ambedkar to the mass educational movement in India. It appears that there is no parallel to Ambedkar during the pre-independence movement in matters of an intellectual input into the arguments that the country needed universalization of education. In this context, Ambedkar seems to have been influenced by his Teacher and Philosopher, John Dewey of Columbia University. Very few Indians in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century had deliberately chosen to get educated in an open society like the USA. One among these was B R Ambedkar and the other prominent figure was Jayaprakash Narayan. Though both the leaders differ in their struggles and outlook, there was a common bondage that could put them together. It was their strong belief in democracy. United States of America at that time was trumpeted as the symbol of liberty and therefore, democracy. There was also a reason for this. One of the prominent advocates of democracy and a great pragmatist was teaching in Columbia University and spreading the message of democracy through his disciples.

This was John Dewey, a great educationist and a democrat. This perhaps, attracted the attention of Ambedkar and he chose to study in Columbia University. In fact, the formative years of Ambedkar were shaped by the academic atmosphere in Columbia.

Experts and scholars have written elaborately about the contributions of Ambedkar to Philosophy, Sociology, Religion among other fields. But there are very few attempts by scholars to project him as a great educationist. In fact, more than half of his life was spent in educational institutions. Even while he was in the thick of politics he took interest in the educational programmes of dalits. Out of 65 years of his precious life, he spent around 50 years as student, scholar, teacher and promoter of education (till 1938) His last assignment was Principal, Government Law College, Bombay in 1938. Therefore, it is necessary to understand and analyze his contributions to the development of education in India in general and to the educational upliftment of weaker sections in particular. In the formulation of special provisions for scheduled castes and other backward classes in the Constitution, Ambedkar seems to have consciously chosen the concept of “educationally and socially backward classes”. He knew that those who were considered as backward or uncivilized at that time were the ones who were denied education. Therefore, Ambedkar had been assiduously fighting for the educational rights not only of dalits, but for the illiterate and ignorant masses of the country.

### John Dewey Impact

It is essential that we should reconstruct here the educational

philosophy of John Dewey. The influence of John Dewey on Dr Ambedkar is so profound that he himself has declared in June 1952, after he was conferred an honorary degree in Columbia University; that I owe my whole intellectual life to Prof John Dewey. This intellectual allegiance of Dr Ambedkar to John Dewey can be seen in every aspect of his active public life including his social and educational movements. The essence of John Dewey’s pragmatism or practical idealism is projection of the ideal of democracy. His concern is that democracy should permeate every aspect of people’s lives, including the way people think and philosophize. As Gordon L Ziniewicz observed that the term democracy as John Dewey construed it, is not confined to actual or potential political regimes, but extends to every facet of human culture.

Democracy for John Dewey is a way of life, a method of thinking, a manner of approach, a habit of expecting the unexpected, an attitude of openness to novelties and variety of flexibility in actively attending to an adjusting facts and conditions as they present themselves. The greatest influence of John Dewey on Ambedkar can be seen in the emphasis on the precept that “the people and relations have to be democratic before democratic institutions can have any meaning.”

Out of six important works of John Dewey, the important book on “Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education,” published in 1916 had influenced the progressive world including Russia and China at that time. It is here John Dewey says that, “democracy cannot go forward unless the intelligence of the mass of people is educated to understand the

social realities of their own time.” The contributions of John Dewey including brief stints in China, Russia and as Signatory of Humanist Manifesto are very significant as he brought out the fact that education and society are not separate, each influencing the other. These ideals have swayed Ambedkar in taking up the agenda of development through democratic national building. Therefore, many of his programmes including education remained to be the foremost in his agenda of upliftment of depressed classes. Even from the beginning of his political career, he was interested in education. In the Bombay Presidency debates of 1927 and 1928 he has raised several issues relating to education which became important for policy formulations on education. In his memorandum to the Simon Commission on “concerning the State of Education of the Depressed Classes in Bombay Presidency” submitted on behalf of the *Bahish Krita Hita Karini Sabha*, he gave numerical data to bring out the miserable condition of the untouchables in the education sector. He has pointed out that enrolment of the dalits constitute 0.87 per cent of the total primary education and 0.14 per cent in Secondary and zero in higher education. Therefore, he wanted protection for the dalits through education guarantee by making the education of the depressed classes as the first charge on the State Revenue. He has also protested the practice of untouchability in municipal schools of Bombay where separate lots were given to dalit boys in his budget debates. This he said, made them to drop out from schools. This is a great economic wastage. He is the first economist who has realized the economic importance of education in India. **(To be concluded)**

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*New Excelsior Building, (3<sup>rd</sup> Floor),  
A. K. Nayak Marg, Fort, Mumbai 400 001.  
Tel.: 022 2205 1231 Fax : 022-2205 1232*

Office : Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai & New Delhi